C U R R E N T D E V E L O P M E N T S I N T H E E A S T E R N

E U R O P E A N C H U R C H E S

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from the Desk for Documentation concerning Eastern European Churches

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Introduction

The year 1960 brought about a strengthening of the relations between the Christian churches. The churches of Eastern Europe, especially the Russian Orthodox Church, played a part in these ecumenical efforts. The efforts for international peace made by the Eastern churches, go hand in hand with their work of promoting understanding between the devided Christian churches. The general desire among the Orthodox churches to draw closer together is strongly supported by the Orthodox churches in the countries of Eastern Europe particularly by Patriarch Alexis of Moscow and all Russia.

The reports contained in the present number of "Current Developments in the Eastern European Churches" therefore concentrate mainly on these efforts and on the efforts of the forces of atheism in the USSR.

The present stage in the life of the churches of Eastern Europe, and of the atheist propaganda is the logical continuation of a long struggle between them.

This interesting stage in the history of the Christian churches in Eastern Europe is reflected in the original documents contained in this number, which to the attentive reader speak for themselves.

The documents have been selected as far as possible with this in mind. Many others could be quoted. Anti-religious caricatures, although not very often published, also deserve special attention.

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C H U R C H N E W S : CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The Ecumenical Council of Churches in Czechoslovakia

The Ecumenical Council of Churches in Czechoslovakia sees two main goals of its activity: "(i) The endeavour to achieve mutual understanding and 'rapprochement' of the Reformation churches in Czechoslovakia in respect of doctrine as well as in practical work. Our churches are aware that they do not really know each other's doctrine and belief. This was evident, for instance, in talks about intercommunion - one church was not very clear what the other church's doctrine of the Lord's Supper was really like. There are other subjects which are not much clearer between us. Above that there are often mutual clashes and a good deal of duplication in practical work, while voluntary coordination would bring much advantage to all churches. It certainly need not be emphasized that the efforts of this kind do not mean that the churches should cease to be fully self-governing, "autocephalous", that they have lost something of their independence by taking part in the Ecumenical Council. - (ii) The second sphere of the activity of the Ecumenical Council concerns the problems of public life. All of us feel that no Christian can remain enclosed in a kind of ghetto, that we have to apply Christian principles in the world around us. And contemporary life confronts us with so many problems crying for Christian solution. One of the most urgent is the question of war and peace. The world faces the decision: will it live in peace and peacefully settle its economic, social and political difficulties, or hazardously risk tension and the cold war which might so easily degenerate into a hot war, bringing about total destruction and annihilation of all life? This is certainly a fateful decision. No believing Christian is allowed to stand aside waiting passively for the result. In the name of Jesus Christ he must enter the struggle for the preservation of peace.

"In this way the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Czechoslovakia tries to be true to its mission inside and outside the churches, a mission given us by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Gospel of love, mercy and peace."

Dr. Viktor Hajek
Senior of the Synod of the
Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren

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C H U R C H N E W S : POLAND

The Central Committee of the Communist Party declared that religious instruction should be stopped in the schools. According to an arrangement between the government and the churches (mainly the Roman Catholic Church) religious instruction has hitherto been admitted in the school system of Poland. So far no comments on this important decision have been published in Poland.

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C H U R C H N E W S : HUNGARY

Bishop Dr. Tibor Bartha states from the annual report

From the annual report, Bishop Dr. Tibor Bartha stated that the composite picture of the life and service of the congregations - to use an expression of the second Helvetic Confession - was characterized by the serenity of joyous thankfulness. Then he gave a profound analysis of the renewal of faith that has taken place in the recent life of the Hungarian Reformed Church and has already yielded fruits calling for our thanksgiving.

Then the Bishop dealt with many gratifying facts bearing witness to the renewal of the Debrecen College, the Seniorates and the congregations. With reference to the work of the General Synod, he stressed that the Transtibiscan Church District - loyal to its historic traditions - has a special sense of responsibility for the nation-wide Reformed Church, for her unity and also for the object that the General Synod, by its newly resumed work, may fulfil its functions. In the course of assessing the significant ecumenical service of this year, the Bishop stated that the congregations - as a result of their deeper understanding of the World of God - were actively engaged in these ministrations. "The testimony of our Church today in international church gatherings is indeed the witness of our congregations", said the Bishop and continued as follows: "The well-understood Word of God pledges our church to proclaim in all areas of international church life the message which has been made vital by the Holy Spirit of God among us. We are in the position to give an account of ministrations through which our congregations partake of our Lord's mission for the benefit of life and man and for conquering death. We must announce with rejoicing and thanksgiving that the World of God has planted our congregations in the place where the church should be, that is, beside the cause of man."

The basic attitude of the Christian is a glad and rejoicing hope. He is certain that "death is swallowed up in victory." However, this hope of the Lord's return is already here on earth, in our time, a real and living hope. This, on the one hand, fills the congregation with thanksgiving and rejoicing and, on the other hand, makes it fit to partake of Christ's service with all available strength, prayer and work in the struggle for life and for conquering the power of death, thus Bishop Bartha summed up his teaching in the concluding part of his annual report.

Inspired giving in a historic parish of the Reformed Church

The Békés Reformed Church, near the Hungarian-Roumanian frontier, with its more than 20,000 members, is one of the largest congregations of the country, also one of the oldest parishes. It was in 1552 that the famous Istvan Szegedi Kiss was called to Békés where he established a Latin school as a subsidiary school to the Reformed College of Debrecen.

Even today the Békés Gymnasium is named after the great Reformer. In the course of stormy centuries the parishioners more than once were rendered homeless. There are historic accounts about the building and subsequent destruction of three wooden churches. The fourth church was built of stone, then, in 1781, the fifth church was built which, with its imposing size, is the present sanctuary of the congregation. The origin of the church rolls and communion vessels go back to the eighteenth century. The Reformed people of Békés were loyal to the cause of freedom at the time of the Rakoczi insurrection and also in the War of Independence of 1848-1849. Their pastor, Abel Hajnal, became famous for his personal courage as a militia commander.

The self-sacrificing generosity inherited from their ancestors is still alive. During the past three years the congregation has raised by collection about 400,000.- Forints to restore the church and the other buildings of the parish. They bought recently new covers for the communion table and the pulpit. The pastors office was recently decorated with a curtain and a carpet, and the pastors were given new gowns.

Hungarian Church Press Service
January 1st, 1961

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C H U R C H N E W S : ROUMANIA

Biserica Ortodoxa Romana

(Official bulletin of the Roumanian Patriarchate)

In the first part are published telegrams and irenical letters exchanged between Patriarch Justinian and other dignitaries as well as with Roumanian State authorities on the occasion of different celebrations. For Christmas 1959, Patriarch Justinian received congratulations from the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and from the Patriarchs of Alexandria, Jerusalem, Moscow, Serbia, Georgia and Bulgaria as well as from other high Orthodox dignitaries including Archbishop Jacobus of America, Archbishop Makarios of Cyprus, Archbishop Theoclitos of Athens etc. The Archbishop of Canterbury also sent his congratulations.

The following pages contain an appeal for peace from Patriarch Teodosios VI of Antiochia. The other pages deal with internal affairs of the Roumanian Church as, for example, the celebration of the birthday of Patriarch Justinian, the opening of the pastoral courses for priests and the remembrance of the Saints to whom the Theological Institute in Bucarest is dedicated.

Under the heading "Ecumenical Patriarchate", a report is given about the visits made by Dr. Franklin Clark Fry and the Bishop of Chelmsford to the Ecumenical Patriarch. It goes on to state that the delegates of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the assembly of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches in Rhodes 1959 have given a detailed report about the meeting and the resolutions passed.

This report, the bulletin writes, was sent to all the Orthodox sister churches by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. For the Orthodox churches who are not members of the World Council of Churches and who sent no observers to Rhodes, it is a very important source of information. The delegation of the Patriarchate made the most praiseworthy efforts in Rhodes to maintain unity of view between the representatives of all Orthodox churches. Besides the conversations and personal contacts which took place almost daily, the delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate held three meetings for the Orthodox during the Rhodes assembly:

1) The first one resulted from the necessity of point study and the fixing of joint tactics regarding the fusion of the World Council of Churches with the International Missionary Council. In this connection Metropolitan Jacob and the other delegates outlined to the Orthodox brethren attending the session the directives laid down by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Patriarchal Commission for general Christian problems, regarding the fusion.

2) The second meeting was held at the end of the session. In the course of a long discussion about the impressions gained and the future possibilities, the necessity was emphasized for all representatives of the Orthodox churches to meet in order to exchange ideas and to fix a joint policy in all matters referring to the contacts with the non-Orthodox world.

3) The third meeting took place on the occasion of a dinner (on Sunday, August 23rd) at the invitation of Metropolitan Spiridon of Rhodes, when the close connections between the representatives of the Orthodox churches and the readiness to cooperate for the triumph of Orthodoxy we strongly emphasized. At the end it is stated that the President of the Ecumenical Patriarch's delegation, Metropolitan Jacob, expressed his thanks to all present and especially to the President of the session. He invited them to visit the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I.

Then it is reported that the Patriarch of Antiochia, Theodosios, paid a visit to the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras "in order to lay his devotion and affection at the feet of the ecumenical throne." When visiting Moscow afterwards, the conversations there "had shown complete agreement of opinion regarding the mission of the Christian Church in the present situation of mankind. The necessity of an always closer cooperation of all Orthodox churches for the purpose of strengthening the noble fight of all honest people in this world for peace on earth, was emphasized."

Under the heading "The Church of Greece", a report is given about the session of the Central Committee in Rhodes. "The fact that apart from the Orthodox member churches of the World Council of Churches representatives of other Orthodox churches also attended the meetings as observers, proves that each Orthodox church is aware of the aims of the World Council of Churches, and that all of them expect a more determined definition of the World Council of Churches' attitude and a clearer explanation of its methods in order to be in a position to consider more active cooperation in a true Christian spirit, i.e. in accordance with the true will of our Saviour Christ."

The bulletin continues: "Among the resolutions passed at this session are some which, although appearing to be nothing outstanding, give evidence of a new and proper orientation of the World Council of Churches towards the urgent present-day problems of mankind."

About Dr. Visser 't Hooft's report, the following is stated among other things: "The statements of the General Secretary regarding the contribution of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the ecumenical movement were followed with great interest. On this occasion the encyclical of the mother church was analysed and the importance emphasized of the initiative taken by the Ecumenical Patriarchate which came at a time when such actions could be considered as utopian. Furthermore the speaker explained what had been meant with the formula 'the communion of the churches' suggested by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. He also announced that shortly, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary since the preparation of this encyclical, an improved and synchronized edition of it would be published in a special issue of 'The Ecumenical Review' in the hope that a proper appreciation of this encyclical will increase the ecumenical interest of the churches."

The bulletin writes as follows about the fusion of the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council: "The attitude of the Ecumenical Patriarchate was stressed by the representatives of the Patriarchate in the course of the negotiations, namely that neither a fusion nor an association between the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council will be possible unless the former changes its character completely, which would undoubtedly result in a revision of the attitude of the Orthodox churches towards the World Council of Churches."

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Biserica Ortodoxa Romana
Year 78, 1960

C H U R C H N E W S : USSR

An Orthodox "united front" urgently needed

Volume 11, 1960, of the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate Church" contains a fifteen-page report on the last meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches held in August 1960 at St. Andrews (Scotland), which was attended by two observers from the Moscow Church, Protopriest V. Boroboy and Victor Alexeev (Secretary of its Foreign Department for Church Relations) who had already attended sessions of the Central Committee at Rhodes 1959, the plenary session of the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order and the discussions of the Working Committee of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs. Their carefully-written report, which tries to give a comprehensive impression of the different aspects of the whole discussion at St. Andrews (which was particularly important in view of the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches to be held at New Delhi, India, in December, 1961) concludes by summing up as follows:

"The most important question, and one which affects Orthodoxy as a whole, is the need for a united policy agreed upon by all the autocephalous Orthodox sister churches which together form the One, Holy Catholic, Apostolic Church.

"In the past, in the present, and in the future, the Orthodox Church was, is and will be One Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church, composed of all the national Orthodox churches, the autocephalous sister churches, some of which were formed during the Early Church, others later, and some of which are taking form today within national or state frontiers.

"Parallel with this given unity of Orthodoxy as the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, however, the temptations to divisions have constantly arisen, tragic in form and harmful in effect, between the autocephalous national Orthodox churches in their relations with the world outside. The result has been a 'raznoboi' (breakdown) of their relations to one another and to other Christian churches, church organisations and associations.

"Our experiences in Rhodes and St. Andrews impel us to face the urgent necessity of coordinating the policy and methods of all the Orthodox churches in their relations with other churches, and unifying them, especially with regard to Catholicism and Protestantism and the inter-church bodies.

"We must achieve unanimity between all the Orthodox churches on this question, so that all the other confessions, all the inter-church organisations in the West or the East, may realise, or be convinced by experience, that if they negotiate with a single national Orthodox Church, or reach an agreement with it, or establish closer contact with it, they are simultaneously dealing with all the Orthodox churches as a single whole. For the views, the policy and the tactics of these national Orthodox churches coincide with the views, the policy and the tactics of all the other Orthodox churches, i.e. of Orthodoxy as a whole.

"The recent meetings of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches have convincingly proved the need for such unity between the Orthodox churches. It would mean in practice that, within the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church the separate autocephalous churches would have independent administrations, but that they would form a united Orthodox Church in all their relations with the world outside (including churches of other confessions), from whatever side they were approached, and whatever branch of Orthodoxy were approached. The observers from the Russian Orthodox Church are glad to say that in all their encounters and conversations with Orthodox dignitaries and with members of Orthodox delegations at Rhodes, Athens and Salonika in 1959, and at St. Andrews in 1960, they were 'of one heart and one soul' (Acts 4:32) on this burning question. It was unanimously agreed that such unity was indispensable.

"All the Orthodox clearly realise the need for a united front in their external relations. The question has now come to a head and requires urgent solution.

"All the Orthodox pray fervently, and in the confident hope that definite steps will be taken towards this end in the spirit of love, unity and brotherhood, which form the soul and the nature of Orthodoxy."

Orthodox observers' impressions of the Lausanne Youth Conference, 1960

One of the delegates sent by the Moscow Patriarchate to the Ecumenical Youth Conference at Lausanne in July, 1960, wrote an account of his visit to Lausanne and Bossey, which was published in the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate", No 10, 1960 (see "Current Developments in the Eastern European Churches" No 4, 1960).

The delegation had been sent with the blessing of the Patriarch. In addition to Father Juvenaly (author of the article) it consisted of a priest, Alexei Ostapov, Victor Zeitzev (who is on the staff of the Foreign Department of the Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow) and Stephan Kostiuk, a student at the Religious Academy in Moscow.

Father Juvenaly describes the friendly welcome extended to the Russian delegates by Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft (General Secretary of the World Council of Churches) after the morning service in the Russian Orthodox chapel in Geneva. "He described our visit as a historic event, because it was the first time the Russian Orthodox Church had sent observers to an ecumenical youth conference."

Father Juvenaly says, "we were greeted at the opening session of the youth conference with thunderous applause". He describes the theme, the programme and the findings of the conference, and gives the message addressed to it by Bishop Nikodim (President of the Foreign Department of the Moscow Patriarchate). Describing the special meetings for Orthodox participants (125 delegates led by Bishop Emilianos, representing the Ecumenical Patriarchate) Father Juvenaly quotes the statement made by Father Alexei Ostapov: "It is very interesting for us to see and hear all that is done and said here. We will inform the Patriarch about the proposals put forward by Christian youth for a deeper understanding of the problems which have to be faced. It is a great pleasure to us to meet so many Orthodox brethren from all over the world. On behalf of the Russian Orthodox observers at Lausanne, I greet you all very cordially and wish you God's help in your work of strengthening the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church."

Father Juvenaly describes the Lausanne youth conference as "the great task of popularising the ecumenical movement." At the same time "this gathering was an experiment in ecumenical work among youth on a very large scale." "We felt the concern of Christian youth for the division between the churches, and for closer fellowship between them, and realised that they regard the Orthodox Church as the true protector of the tradition of the Apostles and the Early Fathers ... As representatives of our great Church we are happy to have made our contribution to this fellowship for the promotion of Christian unity, and for mutual understanding with our friends and brethren in Christ in other lands."

Concerning his stay at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Father Juvenaly writes, he was "very glad to hear from the Director how interested the students are in Orthodoxy". The delegates were particularly pleased when Professor H.H. Wolf (the Director of the Ecumenical Institute) expressed the wish that lectures on liturgical and biblical questions should be given at the Institute by a Professor from the Academies of Moscow or Leningrad.

Father Juvenaly briefly describes the daily services and mentions the Orthodox liturgy and vespers celebrated by the observers from Moscow and attended by the Bossey students. Arrangements had been made for the responses to be sung in German and English, as well as in Slav and Greek. "In Bossey we felt as if we were in one great Christian family, just as we had felt at Lausanne."

Peace statement by the Russian Orthodox Church

The "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate" (No. 9, 1960) has published the text of the statement made by the Russian Orthodox churches at the Christian Peace Conference held last summer in Prague. The name of the speaker is not mentioned.

The statement opens with a blessing from His Holiness Patriarch Alexius, who expresses the hope that this advisory conference may help to promote peace in the world, in accordance with the daily prayers of all churches.

The Russian Orthodox Church, and with it all the Orthodox churches, understand peace "in the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). They therefore regard it as their duty to support their own country, and all nations, in the effort to avoid another war, remembering the words of the Bible: "to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10).

The Christian churches are led to this purpose "by faith in God, the Father ... who enables them to perceive that all men are His children; by faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, and his act of salvation, which has revealed to us the effective power of God's love; by faith in the Holy Spirit who shows us the way to the life of the Church which brings us salvation, and which calls the whole redeemed human race into God's order; and by faith in the indivisible Holy Trinity which reveals to us the mystery of love, of perfect harmony and of peace."

"History shows what a revolution this Christian faith has brought about in human relations, since God's love became incarnate in His Son, who has reconciled men with God" (II Cor. 5:18).

As further criteria of the heritage bequeathed by Jesus Christ to mankind, the statement quotes Matt.22:37-39; Mark 9:50; Matt.5:9 and Luke 9:2.

What is said in these verses "has been sealed by the blood of the martyrs". The seed of the Gospel has sprung up not only in the hearts of individual people, but also in the form of love and peace among all people and all nations.

"Called as we are to build up the Kingdom of God, we Christians regard this (our) mission as the meaning of history. The Church of Christ therefore extends its hope to the whole world, in the effort to include the whole of mankind in its evangelism, not in order to establish any earthly power (for Christ is not of this world) but in order to harmonise all the ethical ideals of mankind, so that they are no longer divided into different camps by religious ideas, moral convictions and spiritual interests."

According to Christian teaching, salvation consists in restoring man's unity with God (destroyed by the Fall), through faith in Jesus Christ. This unity is composed "not of individual, isolated persons, - but of people who are united in the Holy Church, the mysterious Body of Christ."

This unity is unity in God, which includes all living things, "because the creation itself will be set free from bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). This unity therefore includes the whole cosmos, "when all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to everyone" (I Cor. 15:28).

That is the purpose of life, the goal of the creation. The Church must therefore fight against the evil which finds expression especially in stirring up fresh wars. But in its struggle against evil the Church does not dissociate itself from the positive, unselfish heroism which works for the loftiest ideals of the nations: "For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23). The Church therefore supports all good efforts(inspired by the unknown god) in the struggle against evil.

The struggle between good and evil is also being waged in Christian society ... "How often have the personal interests of Christians, both in the East and in the West, opposed the lofty ideals of the Christian faith, and caused Christian bodies to dissociate themselves from the redemptive purpose of the Church". The consequence has been the division of Christendom, especially in the Western hemisphere.

"Today the world is menaced by a new form of lethal warfare ... Things are not improved by the fact that some statesmen, although they call themselves Christians, in practice fall far short of the ideas of peace and brotherhood proclaimed to the world by Jesus Christ."

Everything must therefore be done to prevent the use of force in the solution of international disputes, "so that the principle of co-existence between states with different political structures may triumph."

The Russian Orthodox Church has always advocated the maintenance of peace "for motives which are significant for the whole Christian outlook". Was not the Russian Orthodox Church one of the first to advocate the complete disarmament of all nations "in memory of the holy Fathers of the Church, who described the establishment of international peace as the noblest mission of the Christian Church?"

So at the suggestion of the Patriarch, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Russian Church of the Patriarchate, all the church representatives present agreed to issue an appeal to the churches to use their influence to stop the experiments with nuclear weapons (see "Current Developments in the Eastern European Churches", No 3, 1960). The Church of the Patriarch was supported by the proposal made by the officers of the Ecumenical Council of Czechoslovakia, to convene an international conference of churches for the defence of peace. For the Russian Orthodox Church regarded peaceful international co-existence

as the first sign of the fulfilment of the prophecy in the book of Isaiah: "He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many people; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4).

Why should all Christians not take a united stand on a question that is so crucial for the present time? Are not many Christians in the West taking a lead for peace against atomic warfare? And are they not highly respected for doing so?

But there are many Christians in the West "who regard our country (the USSR) as the Kingdom of Satan which ought to be wiped out with nuclear bombs." They say, "rather a catastrophe than communism" - a view which is equivalent to betraying the Christian faith...

Other Christians in the West (including Orthodox) hold the view that atheism is to be eradicated not by bearing witness themselves to the Christian way of life, but by extending the "Christian front".

"The World Council of Churches is trying to fix a general policy on these matters - a policy in which the theological and social work of a large number of Protestant, and some Orthodox churches would stand together ..."

"The World Council of Churches has indeed on many occasions issued sound statements about the problem of war and peace, and is still doing so. That can only be welcomed, and our Russian Orthodox Church does welcome it. But the World Council of Churches has not yet made any statement about the need for immediate steps for carrying out the proposals for complete universal disarmament."

"This hesitation on the part of the World Council of Churches (about immediately implementing the proposals for peace, which are of Christian origin) reveals an indecisive attitude at a time which calls for immediate action. In face of the menace of a world catastrophe caused by weapons of mass destruction, one need only imagine the tremendous effect it would have, if the Christian churches were to unite in calling for complete disarmament. That would be a great victory for Christianity over the powers of disbelief and a tremendous step forwards towards uniting divided Christians in faith, love and hope."

The statement of the Moscow Church of the Patriarchate expresses anxiety concerning the activities of the Vatican which, it says, "disregards all ethical norms, suppresses the true evangelical faith, and brings division instead of peace into international affairs." It is therefore incumbent upon all Christian churches and religious groups "to take a definite stand against this anti-Christian policy exercised by the Vatican". And "the sympathies of all genuine Catholics will be with us, when they understand the issues"...

"The Cross of Christ is still the light of the world." Referring to Basil the Great, the Russian Orthodox Church again replies to the question why the defence of world peace is the task of all Christians. "In the name of the Holy Trinity, overcome your divisions. Then for centuries to come you will inherit the earth, the inheritance which God bestows on those whom He loves by offering them the hope of eternal life."

Referring to the next peace conference in Prague in 1961, the statement concludes by saying: "This conference must not be regarded as an opposition to the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches which is to be held in New Delhi (India) in the late autumn of 1961. On the contrary, its purpose is to promote Christian unity and thus to strengthen the spirit of ecumenism in the world."

The Christian churches must advocate the idea of peaceful co-existence

The General Secretary of the Alliance of Baptists and Gospel Christians in the USSR, A.V. Karev, recently spoke on the Moscow radio in favour of international co-existence between different economic systems. In this connection it is interesting to read an article in the last volume of "Bratskii Vestnik" (No 3, 1960), published by the Alliance, written by its General Secretary, in which he says, "Although a great deal has already been achieved in the cause of peace by the peace forces of mankind, the menace of another war has not yet been removed. The idea of peaceful co-existence therefore assumes tremendous importance."

When the whole human race, and human civilisation, is menaced by annihilation and destruction, no church and no Christian can remain passive and say, "We don't interfere in politics, and the question of war and peace is a political matter."

The first task confronting politics today is to carry out the lofty ideals of humanism, social justice, peaceful co-existence and international cooperation, and these are also the ideals of the Gospel. All the churches should, therefore, participate in putting these ideals into practice, if they want to be "the salt of the earth and the light of the world."

For many centuries human history consisted of struggles and wars between states. We must put an end to war. The states must take the road of peaceful co-existence and cooperation, whatever their social-political structure. That is the only way out of the impasse into which the human race has got itself.

"We must not say, it is for the politicians to accomplish this. It should be the concern of all the disciples of the greatest humanist who ever lived, our Lord Jesus Christ. Is it not, therefore, the sacred duty of all the Christian churches on earth to do their utmost to promote the welfare of the human race? And is not peace the highest happiness?"

The Christian churches must recognise the great importance of peaceful co-existence between the nations in order to cooperate in overcoming disease, hunger and other evils, and to develop science, technics and culture.

One expert has calculated that if the money spent on the second world war, and all the people who lost their lives in it, had been used for peaceful purposes, the whole of the Sahara desert could have been transformed into a fertile, blossoming oasis.

"The churches have spoken, it is true, by passing resolutions in defence of peace, making all sorts of announcements, and repeatedly expressing their desire to settle disputes by peaceful methods. The whole of Christendom hears their appeals for peaceful co-existence and international cooperation. But the churches, their leaders and their members have by no means all roused themselves from their indifference about the menace of another war."

"Christianity is a great force, but it has not yet done all it could to put into practice the peaceful principles of the Gospel. World Christendom is not yet mobilised as a whole. Christians have by no means all recognised how much the Church of Christ can do to create an atmosphere of peace and friendship in the world."

If the Church assumed as much responsibility for the physical welfare of mankind as it does for their souls, it could not remain indifferent to the defence of peace.

"As all Christians know, the Bible says that God is the Father of the human race. But they do not always try to make mankind into one great family ..."

"We are bound to say that there are still churches which remain silent on the most important question of our time - that of international peace. We must therefore arrive at the point where all the churches and all Christians say a resounding 'Niet' to war. In future let the slogan of all the Christian churches be: to save the human race from war. The only way to avoid a new and devastating nuclear war is to ensure peaceful co-existence between East and West, between capitalism and socialism. In all the Christian churches, therefore, peaceful co-existence between nations must be preached as part of the Christian Gospel."

There is one effective means to prevent wars and ensure peaceful co-existence. That is through complete and universal disarmament, as announced by the USSR leaders. The time has come for all the Christian churches to make this lofty ideal of complete, universal disarmament their most sacred aim, and to make it their sacred duty to put that aim into practice.

Moscow Patriarch concludes Near East visit

Patriarch Alexius, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, has returned home after visiting Orthodox leaders in Greece and the Near East.

During his three-day visit to Athens, the Russian Patriarch joined the Greek Primate, Archbishop Theoklitos, in declaring their "unshakable faith in the fundamental principles of Orthodoxy and its holy institutions".

A joint statement released at the end of the visit pledged that the two Orthodox bodies would attempt to strengthen unity between their own churches. It declared that such unity would aid in preserving world peace.

The Russian Patriarch told Athens newsmen that he favours an exchange of theologians, joint services and pilgrimages with the Greek Church. He further recommended that permanent contacts be made within Orthodoxy concerning the matter of Christian unity, and advocated rapprochement between Orthodox churches and those in the West.

Stressing that the Russian Church would never recognise the Pope's claim as head of the Church, the Patriarch indicated that his church is still examining its attitude toward the World Council of Churches "in a spirit of goodwill".

Meanwhile, Bishop Nicodemus, head of the Foreign Department of the Moscow Patriarchate, told a press conference in Athens that efforts to bring about the union of all churches were both "admirable and genuine". But he insisted that any union should not distort the essence of Orthodoxy.

While in Athens, the Patriarch received several honours from government officials and members of the Holy Synod. He awarded the highest decoration of St. Vladimir to Archbishop Theoklitos, and invited the Greek Primate to pay a return visit to Russia.

Orthodox theologians attach great significance to the visit, believing it to be the beginning of future contacts. On this occasion, the Patriarch and Archbishop Theoklitos agreed that a common attitude should be followed by their churches relative to contemporary ecumenical and pan-Orthodox issues.

Earlier, the Patriarch visited Constantinople. His two-day stay represented the first time since 1589, when the Russian Patriarchate was established, that the Patriarch of Moscow paid a visit to the city.

In the course of his conversations with Patriarch Athenagoras, the Moscow church leader again pointed to the need for greater unity and closer contacts among Orthodox bodies.

On Christmas, the two Patriarchs, assisted by 18 archbishops, bishops and other prelates, celebrated the liturgy. The service was sung in Russian and Greek.

For the first time the General Consuls of the USSR, Roumania, Bulgaria and other countries attended the service. After the service the Ecumenical Patriarch welcomed Patriarch Alexius and underlined the importance of this unique event. Since the 16th century no Russian Patriarch has been in Constantinople, as the country was under Ottoman occupation for four centuries. On this occasion Patriarch Athenagoras presented Patriarch Alexius with a magnificent set of pontifical vestments. Answering the Ecumenical Patriarch, Patriarch Alexius expressed his joy at being at the seat of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the mother church, which filial relations unite with the Church of Russia. He also expressed thanks for the most cordial welcome, which was granted to him and to his suite, and transmitted the greetings of the Russian people to the Ecumenical Patriarchate. He offered as a gift a golden chalice and a paten as symbols of the sacramental communion in Christ between the two churches. Again the Ecumenical Patriarch underlined his own extreme gratitude and that of most of the people for this historical event in

Orthodoxy of having the most beloved head of the Russian sister church among them. He drew attention to the great importance in our disturbed days of such personal contacts among the Orthodox leaders for the unity of the churches and for prevailing peace in the world. At the official dinner which was offered in honour of the Russian guests speeches in a brotherly spirit were exchanged.

In the ecclesiastical circles of Constantinople this visit is considered highly important for the future development of closer co-operation between the Orthodox churches. It was agreed that in the coming years patriarchs and archbishops should more often make visits and coordinate their efforts for the witness of Orthodoxy in the alarming situation of rapid social change and of a commun attitude towards the ecumenical movement.

Exchange of statements between the Patriarch Alexius of Moscow and the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople

Your Holiness,

Kindly accept my joyful and affectionate message which I convey to you on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church, bestowing on this occasion her blessing upon your Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch, and the Church of Constantinople.

The Russian Orthodox Church will never forget that a thousand years ago, during the time of St. Vladimir, the Russian people received from Byzantium the pearl of Christian faith.

Our church will always remember with gratitude the maternal care shown by the Church of Constantinople, tracing back to the historical day when she as a mother church granted autocephalicity to our church.

Although this was accomplished over five hundred years ago, it is only now that the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church in my unworthiness, has the opportunity to visit personally the Ecumenical Patriarch, in order to join in a common prayer, fervent supplications to God for the establishment of peace in the world and the accomplishment of the unity of the churches.

We pray God that He may grant His blessed unity to His Holy Church for the glory of His name and for the fulfilment of His message of peace and love. We know that the Orthodox Church through her faithfulness in the spirit of Christ is able to bring to mankind the message of peace and love, which will liberate it from the fear of the future.

I am very glad to be able to communicate personally with your Holiness and I pray to God that He may grant to your Holiness health and a long life for the benefit of the Orthodox Church.

Patriarch Alexius

Your Beatitude, very dear brother in Christ,

The hierarchy and my flock had been very anxiously awaiting to receive your Beatitude. Praying to God and with our hearts full of gladness, we wish to convey our message to the Patriarch of the Holy Orthodox sister church of Russia.

For many years we have bestowed our blessings and offered our prayers to the Creator of our church, our Christ, pleading for world unity. Deeply moved we now enjoy this sacred moment of the visit of your Beatitude and your suite.

As this is the first time that the Russian Patriarch has visited the Holy Ecumenical See, let us accomplish a spiritual pursuit by tracing back to the past when the Russian people received the Holy baptism by the hands of priests sent by Constantinople. Our minds recall the long history of Orthodox Christianity in Russia at a time when the Russian Church enjoyed a flourishing confession of Christian faith and a fruitful spiritual glory, elevating a great number of Saints, confessors and martyrs, who honour Orthodox martyrology.

For that reason the Holy Ecumenical See granted the initiative to the Russian Church, preserving at the same time unity in faith with all the other Orthodox churches and especially with the Great Mother Church of Christ.

In this spirit of love and unity, prevailing over the churches within the One Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church, we look upon your visit as a pilgrimage to the other ancient Patriarchal churches. Your visit coincides with the time when Christ is born at Bethlehem in order to save mankind. God blesses everyone who works for the unity of the one body in Christ, as well as the task of the prelacy, of the holy clergy and the pious flock of your Holy Church, surrounding the See of your Beatitude and strengthening her faith and love.

We therefore wish to express our heartfelt thanks to your Beatitude, so dear to our heart, as well as to your suite, for your blessed visit and your courteous message of love and affection addressed to our ancient Orthodox centre.

The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople

("Apostolos Andreas", the official paper of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, January 4th, 1961)

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M I S C E L L A N E O U S:

"Chronicle about church life abroad"

For the first time the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate" (No 11, 1960) published a "Chronicle about church life abroad". The short notices in this section include outstanding events in the Orthodox Church: Installation of Paul, Archbishop of the autonomous Orthodox Church of Finland; the consecration of the Greek Archimandrite Emilianos Timiadis (permanent representative of the Ecumenical Patriarch at the World Council of Churches) as Bishop of Meloa; the rededication of a church for the exclusive use of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate Church in Munich. However, it also gives news about the Protestant churches and the ecumenical movement: the expulsion of Bishop Ambrose Reeves (Anglican) from the South African Union on account of his view on Apartheid; the death of Professor John Baillie (one of the Presidents of the World Council of Churches); the installation of Dr. Martin Lindström as the new Lutheran Bishop of Lund, etc. Thus the readers of the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate" are now kept informed about the work of the other churches in the world.

* * *

An old church preserved as a national monument

"Vokrug Sveta" (Around the World) is a geographical monthly magazine which draws the attention of Soviet readers to the beautiful and interesting things to be seen all over the world. It also includes interesting places within the Soviet Union.

The October 1960 number, for instance, contains an illustrated article on the Bielozersk district, which lies between the Volga and the Baltic, its most important town being the industrial town of Cherepovetz. This district of northern Russia is very precious to the Russian people "because here the Russian summer comes up to everyone's expectations. There are quantities of wild strawberries and in spite of the stony soil the ground is carpeted with flowers." What is it that imparts such charm to this landscape? Is it the varied colours of the trees and grasses, in every shade of pale and dark green? Is it the colouring of the many lakes and of the sky which they reflect - limpid blue, grey or blue-black? Wooden churches and windmills, little chapels and big farm-houses, old monasteries and belfries and many other monuments of Russian architecture are found in this district, built by architects whose names are unknown. They were real artists, for no one has ever understood nature in this area as well as they. Everything that they have built has contributed towards perfecting the landscape of Bielozersk.

Not far from Mount Maury, on the shore of Lake Borodajev, stands the Teropontov Monastery. "One of its churches is famous all over the world; it contains frescoes painted by the famous Dionissii in the first half of the 16th century - an outstanding monument of Russian

art. The frescoes are wonderfully well preserved; to paint them, Dionissii used 150 different colours, which he made himself out of the local soil. The flowing lines of his frescoes and their ethereal, warm colouring harmonise in a wonderful way with the pale colours of the surrounding landscape."

Opposite the monastery, near the village of Shtsholkovo, stands a windmill "whose bare silhouette creates a positively monumental impression ... So does the little church in the village of Borodaevo, built in 1486, whose proportions are so perfect that one is never tired of looking at it." This church "looks as if it had been built by nature herself; it fits so harmoniously into the countryside with its high roof crowned by onion-shaped towers. This church has now been moved in order to make room for an artificial lake which is to be constructed at Cheropovetz-Kyrillov. It now stands in the former monastery of Kyrillov-Belozersky, which has been turned into a museum."

* * *

Communist appeal to religious believers to unite in face of the imperialist war-menace

The statement (Zaiavlenie) drawn up at the last congress of representatives of the Communist and Labour parties of all countries (the text of which was printed in "Komsomolskaia Pravda", Moscow, December 7th, 1960, and in other newspapers) contains a section on "The problem of war and peace" which three times emphasises the necessity for cooperation "between communist peace-promoters and all friends of peace, whatever their beliefs, in order to avoid fresh wars in future."

All the peoples know that the danger of a fresh world war has not yet been eliminated, says the statement. "The strongest force of aggression and war is American imperialism." The struggle against the war-menace must therefore be extended on every side "before the atomic bombs and hydrogen bombs begin to rain down on us." This struggle must be started immediately and must be increased every day... in order to prevent the outbreak of war.

"A lasting peace will be secured for us through the peace-movement, which is the most powerful movement of our time, uniting people of different political and religious convictions from different classes of society in the noble effort to avert future warfare. In order to maintain peace in the world, it is of the greatest importance that the socialist system should be further strengthened. But as long as general disarmament is not a fact, the socialist countries are bound to maintain their defences at the required strength.

"No differences of a political, religious or other nature must present obstacles to the union of the whole strength of the working class against the menace of war. The hour has struck for the international proletariat to unite in a common front against the warmongers, and to cooperate in order to avert war and to maintain peace.

"The communist parties regard the struggle for peace as their noblest task. They appeal to the working class, the trade-unions, the associations for women and for young people, and to all workers irrespective of their political and religious convictions, to resist all acts of aggression by the imperialists by their united opposition.

"But if in spite of this the imperialist fools do start a war, then the peoples (including those who believe in religion) will sweep imperialism away and bury it once and for all. For the cooperation between all the forces of the working class against the war-menace must not be weakened by any differences of opinion on political, religious or other questions."

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A T H E I S T P R O P A G A N D A I N T H E U.S.S.R.

The preaching of irrationalism and mysticism

by E.G. Fillimonov

"This article examines the methods whereby the attempt to reconcile science and religion is made by one of the biggest religious organisations in the USSR, namely, the Protestant Sect or the 'Christian Baptist Evangelical Church'.

"The author considers that the Baptists in the USSR, while inheriting the irrationalist line of the founders of Protestantism as regards their views on reason and science, at the same time are inclined, in the spirit of the Protestant school of liberal theology, to regard science and religion as coexisting on different planes, and adhere to the concept of 'dual truth'.

"In the struggle between fundamentalism and modernism, the Evangelical Christian Baptists in the main adhere to fundamentalism. But the flourishing of science in socialist society, and its popularity among the people compel the Baptists to make concessions to modernism in theology. The Baptists' modernism is expressed in their attempts to give a 'near-scientific' interpretation of biblical myths, in understanding the 'divine inspiration' of the Bible, etc. However, the main tendency of Baptism in the USSR is anti-intellectualism, rejection and condemnation of reason, the propagation of downright mysticism and irrationalism.

"The confusion in the Baptist ideology in the USSR reflects the general crisis of religion in socialist society, in this age of tremendous scientific discoveries about nature."

Voprosy Filosofii, No. 12, 1960

Holy Business

"The Epistle of the Apostle Paul to Titus contains the following words, 'Bid slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to be refractory' (Titus 2:9).

"The Roman Catholic Church has forgotten many of the things in the New Testament, but throughout its long history it has never forgotten the above injunction. The Catholic Church has known no higher truth than the dogma of the submission of the slaves. The slave-system of the Romans, who thought out this dogma, came to an end long ago, and since then much water has flowed under the bridge. Many Christians have perished in the struggle against slave-owners, thus sacrificing their lives for the cause of freedom. And today the best representatives of the Christian world are on the side of the oppressed. But to the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church, the dogma of the submission of the slaves is just as valid today as it was eighteen centuries ago. The Holy Father in Rome may regard himself as the theoretical expert on colonialism, for he carries out in practice exactly what he preaches in theory."

The Jesuits enter the fray

"The Vatican is more active today than it has been for a long, long time. All the higher clergy are involved in these activities ... The Order of Jesuits, the sharpest weapon of the church in its political struggle, has been constantly mobilised for over four hundred years.

"The cleverest and most brilliant agents of the Jesuit faith are being sent out to Africa, to the Near East, to the countries in the South of Asia, and to Latin America. Rome is talking about the birth of a new 'black' church and of the project to develop 'yellow' Catholicism.

"The Vatican is equipping itself for these changes and new projects in the church. On the steps of the papal palace one sees all sorts of new dignitaries... Among the cardinals there is now a negro, a Japanese and a man from the Philippines. The highest dignitaries of the Roman Catholic Church already include 68 Asian and 25 African Bishops and Archbishops. Since 1957 the head of the Order of Jesuits has had a special 'assistant' for the countries of South Asia.

"Two-fifths of the funds at the disposal of the 'Congregatio de Propaganda fide' are now being spent in Africa, where over 200 Cathlic papers are being published. When the bandit-leader Mobutu seized the power in the capital of the Congo, only two daily papers were allowed to continue; they were published by Catholic priests. The whole organisation of the Catholic Church in the Congo is under the control of the Jesuits, whose missionaries preach sermons attacking the legal government of Lumumba... and set up active reactionary groups. For here the French, Belgian and Bonn imperialists want to lay the foundation of 'Eurafrica', a new intercontinental capitalism which they reckon will pump fresh African blood into the veins of their aging bourgeois

society ... And their plans are supported by the Vatican which is setting up new stategroups under clerical leadership ... and trying to extend the Congo experiment to the whole of Africa - a plan which is worthy of Ignatius Loyola's famous college of diplomacy.

"The same thing is happening in other countries, for instance Indonesia, South Vietnam, and the Arab countries where Catholicism is fraternising with Islam for the purpose of a 'holy war'. For the Vatican has always regarded the anti-communist pact between Christians and Moslems as a basic element of its policy. Thus Christ's representative on earth holds out his hand to Mohammed, in order to make the Near East into a link between the projected clerical states in Africa and Asia.

"The Jesuits are still thinking in the categories of the seventeenth century, when their Order was created for the purpose of combatting the monsters from hell, the monstrous offspring of Satan.

"The 65 year old Cardinal Gadshanian, who visited the East four times in 1959 (Lebanon, South Vietnam, Taiwan, etc.), and who from Saigon is in charge of the Catholic bishops in Laos, Cambodia, Tailand, the Philippines, South Korea and Malay as far as Japan and Indonesia, is also in the service of Catholic neo-colonialism. In addition the Vatican is aiming at Angola and Mozambique - areas of Africa where tremendous quantities of oil, uranium, copper, gold and cobalt are available.

"In Latin America the Vatican controls several large banks. It also finances the big firms in the Belgian, French and Portuguese territories (including prospecting for uranium in Katanga).

"The Vatican no longer supports the old colonial powers, and it hypocritically describes its efforts as attempts at decolonisation, and describes the new Catholic states which it plans to set up as 'free' states. The theoretical independence of these states is expressed in new flags and weapons with which they have been supplied, for'that is pleasing in the eyes of God'. Their leaders may be people like Tshombe, Kassavubu, etc.; but those leaders are supported by the black robes and behind them are the big companies from New York, London, Paris and Brussels ... protected by the generals of NATO, SEATO and SENTO, for 'that is pleasing in the eyes of God'.

"Was it not Dostojevsky's Grand Inquisitioner who said: 'We will convince the human rebels that they can only be free if they renounce their own freedom and submit to us'?

"As for Pope John XXIII, it is difficult to quarrel with His Holiness. But when the Pope speaks of his maternal feelings (for the oppressed peoples), he may possibly be thinking of the words in Matthew's Gospel: 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.'"

Literaturnaia Gazeta, Moscow
10th January 1961

Is man's sense of beauty imparted by God?

A short time ago, in the cathedral of Zagorsk (the Troitse-Sergieva Laura, near Moscow) an elderly man and an attractive young woman were admiring the iconostasis painted by the great Russian artist, Andrei Rubliov. The man was explaining to his companion how it came to be painted. Half joking, half in earnest the woman replied, "It's beautiful. When you look at it, you almost believe all that."

These are the opening words in an article in "Nauka i Religia" (Science and Religion, October 1960) entitled "Is man's sense of beauty imparted by God?"

"The capacity for perceiving beauty has developed during the course of human history. It grew stronger as craftsmanship and thought developed (Marx: Man becomes creative in accordance with the laws of beauty). Creative activity enables man to perceive the beauty in the things which he makes; we need only think of the knives and daggers of antiquity, which prove that man was able to impart beauty to the shape of the wood and the iron, or of the Greek amphoras with their perfect proportions and their wonderful decoration.

"As society continued to develop, however, and class distinction arose, social factors began to have an influence on beauty. 'The lovely peasant-girl', painted in the age of serfdom, is quite different from the wives and daughters of the feudal lords, who were admired if they looked aesthetic, delicate and slim with slender hands."

"Nauka i Religia" adds the following comment: "The appreciation of beauty is a complicated process. The decisive factor in it is ultimately the social background of the person who is pronouncing an opinion, i.e. his taste depends on his class. Religious ideology also exercises a definite influence on people's sense of beauty. That is clear when one notices the different effect which the same work of art makes on religious people, and on atheists.

"To Christians the little (Orthodox) church of Pokrov-na-Nerli (near the town of Vladimir in Central Russia) is primarily a holy place, a temple, where they can meet with God and hold religious services. It is not so much the architectural symmetry, the decoration, in fact the whole beauty of the glorious building, which appeal to the Christian's sense of beauty, but rather the church services for which the building serves as a framework, the services held in it, and the sacred vessels kept in it.

"On the other hand the man who loves Russian art but who is an atheist, when he sees the architecture of the church at Pokrov-na-Nerli, is deeply impressed by the beauty of Russian architecture. He appreciates this little church because of its typically Russian form, the unique beauty of its architectural lines, and the details which contribute to the beauty of the whole building. For him this little church is a golden page in the history-book of Russian art, which reveals how the sense of beauty has developed in the Russian people. It therefore evokes in him a deep sense of pleasure, because it arouses his national pride.

"In the same way, the beauty of the cathedral of St. Basil in the Red Square in Moscow, or the cathedral of St. Sophia in Kiev, make an entirely different impression upon a Christian and upon an atheist.

"The same applies to religious painting. The famous Sixtine Madonna of Raphael evokes an appreciation of beauty in people of different social classes. Christians and atheists both enjoy it. But the Christian is attracted by it mainly because it represents the Mother of God, because of her supernatural, divine nature.

"But if one regards the Sixtine Madonna from the standpoint of scientific materialism, one appreciates something quite different about it. M.V. Alpatov, the famous Soviet art critic, for instance, is attracted by this masterpiece because it expresses beauty in relation to the world of mankind 'surrounded by the sense of the tragedy of human life'. The 'Madonna' theme is fused together with the poetic praise of feminine beauty. Raphael's artistic genius impresses everyone because in it everything lofty and ideal comes close to man, and is expressed in actual earthly beauty ...

"So when a Christian and an atheist look at the same work of art, its beauty impresses them in two different ways. This does not mean that the Christian cannot perceive the national beauty of Russian church architecture or the earthly beauty of the Madonna. But it does mean that for the Christian the norm of beauty is his religion. When he looks at Raphael's Madonna, therefore, he enjoys its beauty, but only through the coloured spectacles of religion.

"Which concept of beauty is closer to the truth, that of the atheist or that of the Christian? Which is the ultimate criterion for true aesthetic appreciation? The quality of beauty in material phenomena, and in art, is an objective fact, which is quite independent of human appreciation. The church at Pokrov-na-Nerli is beautiful, whether people perceive its beauty or not. The quality of its architecture does not depend on the people who look at it.

"This raises the question: can religion enhance the true perception of the quality of a work of art? The answer is 'no'; religion distorts man's impressions of the universe, and consequently his sense of beauty also. Religion directs people's impression of beauty into the stream of religious sentiment and compels them to concentrate mainly on its religious value. This means that the Christian's appreciation of beauty becomes narrow and distorted.

"For centuries religion has been instilling the idea into people that there is no real beauty on earth, and no real happiness; they exist only in heaven. People were taught to consider an imaginary supernatural god as the loftiest concept of beauty. In fact, religion is still doing this. A well-known preacher in the Russian Orthodox Church recently told his congregation: 'No one in this world can experience absolute happiness... It is only in eternal life that we shall know the fulness of joy.' Religious people cannot, therefore, be happy in this world. They cannot enjoy life or the beauty of this world. According to the religious view, the world in which man lives has no value, and therefore no aesthetic value. On the other hand the doctrine of materialism wants to help people to appreciate the beauty of the world, including the great achievements of art, and to understand the nature of man in all its beauty.

"During the course of history religion has gained much experience in ways of distorting people's feelings, and making them passive and resigned to their earthly fate. The dominant idea in religion is the impotence of man, depression and sadness. Expressions of tragedy, fear and despair therefore have a particularly marked effect on Christian people. The story of the Passion, of the Crucifixion of Christ, the sufferings of pious hermits and apostles, saints and 'holy fools' (Jurodivye), all this arouses the religious sympathies of Christians and gives them tremendous pleasure.

"Tragic events, however, are not eternal or unchangeable. The tragedy in human life is due to social causes, to the imperfection of the social structure, to the class-struggle, etc. Progress will ultimately overcome the difficulties which have hitherto beset mankind; so that the new class (the proletariat) has an optimistic, forward-looking mentality.

"Religion has no sense of humour or comedy. There is nothing amusing about religious rites. Fanatical Christians even pray God to prevent the world from becoming happy and optimistic.

"People cannot enjoy beautiful things if they have lost their positive attitude to life. Many anti-religious, anti-church and anti-clerical popular sayings show how people have been distorted by religion. Among the broad masses of the people there exists a true understanding of beauty, a strong optimism and self-confidence, which is just what materialism wants to give them. The Christian religion, on the other hand, echoes the words of the Apostle Paul, 'My strength is made perfect in weakness'.

"Thus religion deprives people of their sense of beauty, of their creativity and their joy in life.

"Beauty can therefore only be appreciated by people with a scientific view of life. History confirms that beauty is revealed only to people who believe in the progress of human society."

"Not in accordance with the Gospel"

On the 20th November, 1960, the peoples of the Soviet Union celebrated the 50th anniversary of the death of Leo Tolstoy, the great Russian writer. The leading papers in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and the capitals of the Soviet People's Republics published articles about Tolstoy, whose works can now be read in their mother-tongue, by everyone in the USSR. Nearly all the works of Tolstoy have been translated into every language spoken in the Soviet Union, and over 400 million copies have been published.

The love and veneration felt for Leo Tolstoy today are expressed in many articles, which describe the famous characters in his novels ("War and Peace", "Anna Karenina", "Resurrection") and his stories (such as "The Cossacks") as "plastic and tangible against the background of the

supra-personal ties of human life as a whole." In these characters created by Tolstoy he endeavours to sketch the prototypes showing the basic human response to the basic situations of life - in so far as their lives reflect a binding human ethos, or a personal reaction against it.

After reading the contributions in many different languages in the different publications in the USSR, one is struck by Tolstoy's intuitive understanding of the conditions of his time within the timeless setting of human life. "Tolstoy is a world in himself", is the title of an article in the "Literaturnaia Gazeta" (the leading paper of the Soviet Authors' Association in Moscow, No 138, 1960).

Another article, which emphasises the unique literary value of Tolstoy's work, refutes the idea that he was a "religious" man. This article appeared under the title "Not in accordance with the Gospel" (Ne po Evangeliu). This last article, printed in the special number of the "Literaturnaia Gazeta" devoted to Tolstoy, on the 19th November 1960, examines Tolstoy's religious outlook. (As is well-known, Tolstoy was excommunicated on account of his disagreement with the teaching of the Russian Orthodox Church under the Czars, and especially because he refused to accept the basic concept of the Church in the form represented by Orthodoxy).

The paper refers to Tolstoy's story "The Cossacks" (written between 1852-1862) in which he describes the free peasants in the South of Russia who had never been serfs. "Literaturnaia Gazeta" remarks that Tolstoy realised that these peasants would never have tolerated the patriarchal order of feudal land-ownership (and would therefore never have tolerated religion). In "The Cossacks" one of the main characters therefore is Diadia Jeroshka, who is representative of the free peasants, and who "had nothing to do with religion". Was that surprising? asks the paper. No, because Jeroshka considered it perfectly natural that "grass would grow out of his body after his death". Jeroshka's love of life was rooted in his deep sense of being one with nature.

What were the views of Leo Tolstoy himself on being one with nature, and on religion? During his first period as a writer, when he wanted to identify himself with nature and with the people, Tolstoy did not believe in God or in religion. It is an interesting fact (continues the paper) that during that period Tolstoy wrote his first essay on religion. He wrote it in 1865, when he had not yet abandoned the idea of finishing "The Cossacks" (on which he had been working for so long) ... As he himself admits, he wrote the essay under the influence of the French philosopher and essayist, Montaigne.

The paper comments: "Tolstoy's book 'The Cossacks' already shows that in his attitude to the world, to human activities, and to an understanding of the world through understanding the individual worker, he regarded religion as of secondary importance and as an obstacle to the perception of freedom."

Commenting on the novel "Resurrection", the author of the article remarks: "Katiusha Maslova loves Nekhliudov but refuses to give herself to him ... and Nekhliudov deserts her." The solution of the conflict at the end of "Resurrection" is therefore not a real

solution: "Nekhliudov buries himself in reading the New Testament. Tolstoy had promised his readers, however, to write another novel describing the new (religious) life of Nekhliudov. But he did not do so. Why? Because history offered a different solution - a solution which was not in accordance with the Christian Gospel".

Tolstoy's religious views are summed up by "The Communist" (the theoretical-political paper published by the Central Committee of the Communist party in the Soviet Union, No 16, November 1960).

"The 52nd volume of Tolstoy's Works, pp. 120-121, contains a remarkable extract from his diary. He was 65 years of age and had been for his usual walk near his estate: "I was lost in contemplation of the wonderful sunset. In the midst of a heavy bank of clouds the red sun gleamed through. It shone over the cornfields, and my heart was glad and I thought, 'No, our world is not a vale of tears, nor a place of transition to a better, eternal world. It is itself one of the eternal worlds filled with beauty, life and joy, which we can and must make more beautiful and more joyful both for our contemporaries and for those who will come after us.'...

"The Soviet people, which is composed of all sorts of different peoples bound together by the bond of friendship and brotherhood and guided by the teachings of Marc and Lenin, is making Tolstoy's dream a reality, by creating the most beautiful, free and joyous order of society in the world."

"The miraculous Icon" again

Vladimir Tendriakov is one of the outstanding authors of the younger generation in the Soviet Union. His story, about the miraculous icon (see "Current Developments in the Eastern European Churches", No 4, 1959) has made him famous, and the story has now been made into a film.

The purpose both of the book and of the film is to show the harmful influence of religion. "Literaturnaia Gazeta", the journal of the Soviet Authors' Association (Moscow, 17th December, 1960) contains the following review:

"After reading this story, we realised the urgent necessity to oppose religion, and the film (produced by W. Skuibin) makes the same deep impression."

The story may be summarised as follows. Young Rodka Guliaev finds a buried icon, and his family therefore regard him as a saint. Quarrels occur between Rodka and his grandmother, and these quarrels culminate in a dramatic climax. Rodka's school friends make fun of him because he wears a cross round his neck. This makes him so furious that he hacks the icon to pieces. His grandmother punishes him so severely that the boy tries to commit suicide. But thanks to his atheist teacher, Praskovia Petrovna, his life is saved. The film ends almost on a note of tragedy: "Rodka, the lively, fair-haired boy with the serious eyes,

nearly lost his life. The 'miraculous icon' which he found was almost a malediction to him. It did not quite destroy him, but this does not make the film any less dramatic."

"One leaves the cinema feeling deeply disturbed. The scene in which Rodka is found after his attempt to commit suicide is extremely impressive, with the shadowy figure of his grandmother running away into the darkness at nightfall. The film has no real conclusion, for the struggle is still continuing.

"The film makes big demands on the audience. It does not send them away satisfied with a happy ending, but leaves them feeling deeply disturbed. But there is no uncertainty about the impression which it leaves on their minds. It shows most convincingly the advantages of breaking away from the 'hangover' of religion. The film helps people to see things more sharply and to understand them more clearly, not to think superficially but to get to the heart of things."

"Literaturnaia Gazeta" stresses the fact that the film producers have sharply contrasted the world of faith and the world of scepticism. To do this they have made use of every possible device of composition, speed and sequence. The film is based on sharp contrasts: the dim, oppressive atmosphere in the grandmother's house, the dark force of religion, and on the other hand the radiant beauty of the world that is free from religious oppression, the joy in life experienced at first-hand.

"The photographs of nature in the film are glorious, the broad horizons, the flowering meadows, the sunny clearings in the forest. Rodka is beautiful when one sees him bathing in the clear river, and when he and his school friends are making a rocket to shoot into the sky. But how oppressive he finds the low ceilings and dark walls of the village hut which is his home. What a paralysing effect the faces of the believers have on the little chap, with their dull yet piercing eyes full of fanaticism."

"Literaturnaia Gazeta" then describes the scene where Rodka's young friends discover the cross that his grandmother has hung round his neck. "This is a difficult part for the young actor, V. Vassiliev. It would not be easy even for an experienced actor. But the boy plays the part extremely convincingly and has created a character which is genuine, strong and alive. This is a tremendous achievement on the part of the production and presentation for instance in the scene where the miraculous icon with the hard merciless face of Saint Nicholas seems to pass right over the boy ...

"The other parts in the film are also well played. But the most outstanding performance is that of the actress K. Palovskova who plays the part of the teacher, Praskovia Petrovna. She embodies the positive idea of the film (the rejection of religion).

"The actor who represents the priest Dimitrii is less convincing. He is not forceful enough in the role of that dangerous, sly opponent of the Soviet regime, who nevertheless knows very well how to adapt himself to conditions in the Soviet Union!

"The character of the teacher, however, expresses a personality who is doing everything in her power to fight for the purity of the human soul. She embodies the citizen who realises his duties and responsibilities as a member of the party. The film reaches its climax when Praskovia Petrovna walks along the road from the village into the town, in order to cut Rodka off from religion once and for all. With big strides she marches along between the ripe cornfields, the Kolchose with their electricity masts, and the smoking factory chimneys in the distance, while at the same time (in the film) one hears Rodka's voice reading a letter sent to his teacher from the 'Agricultural Front'. Thus the highest aims and incontestable truths of a new and radiant world, to which Rodka will return, are artistically expressed."

Our opinion on religion and the Church

T.A. Doyle, from Pomona, California, asked "Nauka i Religia" (Science and Religion) in Moscow for an answer to the following questions:

Question: Do Marxists believe there is no God or do they merely deny his existence?
Answer: Marxists do not believe in God because they deny his existence ...

Question: Do they think the belief in God is inconsistent?
Answer: Of course, it is contradictory, it is absurd. The so-called Holy Books of the Jews, Christians and Moslems all describe God as: All-merciful, All-knowing, All-mighty and omnipresent. And analysis of these divine attributes shows that every one of them exists separately and that they exclude one another. God's Almightiness conflicts with the fact that God is incapable of arresting evil (his unsuccessful battle against the devil). The concept of "God" can only be used in accordance with Tertullian's principle: "Credo quia absurdum".

Question: What scientific arguments do you employ to disprove the idea of God?
Answer: Soviet atheists completely deny the idea of a God. Their arguments are based on the findings of science and of public practice. In this, they are guided by scientific facts and public practice. We do not invent special arguments, we consider that superfluous, because the achievements of science, which confirm the view that science is incompatible with the idea of a God, are becoming constantly more manifest, more profound and are leading to more and more precise definitions. We do not need new scientific arguments against the idea of God, because our whole life is sufficient to refute his existence. What we need to do is to continue to strengthen, deepen and define those atheist arguments which science has evolved during the course of the centuries ... For the so-called historical, ethical and theological "proofs" of God's existence has been disproved by science long ago. The idea of God has become invalid because his existence has not been proved.

Question: When was the first atheist library opened; how many books does it contain and who are their authors?

Answer: In the Soviet Union, extensive material is published on questons of religion and atheism, starting from natural science, philosophy, history, ethnography, etc. ... More specially, the Institute for History of the Academy for Sciences in the USSR is publishing books on scientific atheism in order to give wide circles of the population access to atheist thought.

Question: What publications in defence of atheism have become especially popular in the Soviet Union?
Answer: All publications of all progressive thinkers of every century and nation. We have not always agreed with them on all points, but we believe that they have furthered atheist thought. (There follows an enumeration of the writings of Diderot, Hollbach and others until E. Yaroslavsky, the leader of the "godless" movement in Russia before the Second World War.)

Question: Do you intend to have Russian atheist publications translated into English?
Answer: We do not plan to do so, but we do not mind if our atheist publications are translated into the vernacular of foreign countries.

Question: Why do the communists refuse to enter the World Association of Free-Thinkers?
Answer: At one time there was the Godless League in the USSR, which was affiliated to the World Association of Free-Thinkers. Today, there is no special atheist organisation in the USSR, as atheism is spread by the many organisations for the propagation of scientific enlightenment. These organisations cannot join the International Association of Free-Thinkers because of the character and shape of their work.

Question: Marxists make a political distinction between bourgeois and proletarian atheism. Do you think that an exchange of information between the bourgeois and proletarian atheism could serve a fruitful purpose for both parties?
Answer: As Marxists, we believe that there is a basic difference between proletarian and bourgeois atheism, the main difference being that the struggle of proletarian atheism against religion is bound up with the direct task of the working class to bring about a communist order of society. Proletarian atheism therefore regards it as its duty to eradicate religion. That is why it cannot come to any compromise with it.

Bourgeois atheism, on the contrary, limits its struggle against religion to mere enlightenment. In its struggle against religion it is inconsistent and ever ready to compromise, especially in the fields of morals and ethics.

But that does not exclude the possibility of cooperation between communist and bourgeois atheism. We believe on the contrary that the struggle of bourgeois atheism against religion serves the cause of progress which creates a large sphere of activity for both trends. The exchange of information should therefore be intensified.

We deeply rejoice in the fact that bourgeois atheism rejects war, promotes peaceful coexistence between the different states and peoples and propagates world peace. From this angle cooperation between us is warmly welcomed.

"The Atheist's Companion" reviewed by the Academy of Sciences

One of the most important anti-religious books published in Soviet Russia in 1959 was "The Atheist's Companion" (Sputnik Ateista), a 544-page handbook compiled by Professor S.I. Kovalev. This book is now being subjected to thorough criticism by "Voprosy Filosofii" (Questions of Philosophy), the monthly paper published by the Academy of Sciences in the USSR (No 10, 1960).

The handbook (see "Current Developments in the Eastern European Churches", No 2, 1960), which is intended as a reference-book for the use of atheist propagandists, deals with a broad and complicated number of questions. It was not easy to present all these problems in a form that would be generally understood. "In general the information given in the book is satisfactory, despite some inadequacies. Thus the sections on Hinduism, Buddhism and religion in China fill a gap in the research-work of atheism and are well written. The author rightly stresses the fact that Confucianism is not really a religion but a form of ancester-worship.

"The attempt to analyse systematically the basic problems of atheism has never yet been undertaken,and is a positive factor." But the handbook contains many incorrect and inadequate statements which call for improvement.

The main weakness of the book is its theoretical section "which does not do justice to the present situation of religion". It does not say enough about essential questions concerning the origin of religion or of the different religious groups, the history of atheism, the relation between communist and religious ethics and between the scientific and the religious ideologies, and "these are the main problems which concern atheist propaganda".

It is true that religion is based on belief in the supernatural. "But the authors of these sections of the book, in our opinion, disregard the emotional and especially the cultural factors in religion when they state that, although religion is connected with a certain form of ritual, this does not mean that religion cannot live without a service of worship." "An example of this is modern sectarianism, in which ritual has been reduced to a minimum." "This is not true. The religious sects have indeed dropped many religious rites, but at the same time they have introduced a refined form of ritual."

The handbook does not deal adequately either with the spiritual roots of religion, which is one of the most difficult problems. "It has missed an opportunity of paying more attention to this problem." Owing to false concepts of many aspects of reality man began to draw a distinction between his own characteristics and real essence of the word. "The forces of nature dominating man began to assume fantastic reflections within his consciousness. We do not think that the average reader will understand what this means. How was prehistoric man separate from nature, and why did the forces of nature assume these fantastic forms in his consciousness?"

"With regard to the rise of the Christian Church, also, the handbook is inadequate." It does not explain sufficiently clearly why "the Christian Church, which was originally democratic, developed into a religion which gave its blessing to the oppression and exploitation of the workers". It does not make clear the struggle between the opposing streams within the Early Church, a struggle which is of great importance for an understanding of the contradictions contained in the Christian faith: the desire for peace in connection with the "Jesusism" and revolutionary Christian "Messianism".

The chapter on the history of the Russian Orthodox Church, on the other hand, is of particular interest for the anti-religious propagandist, because even today the religious outlook of Orthodoxy shows "that it is bound to weaken people's self-confidence and to foster a feeling that it is hopeless to struggle for a new social order. For the ideology of the Orthodox Church is conservative and reactionary".

"The book is better when it points out that fundamentally Protestantism and Catholicism are the same, and it rightly stresses the fact that the Catholic parties (Christian Democrats) are pioneers in a clerical-militaristic regime."

But the handbook's description of the attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church, and of some other Christian organisations in the USSR, to Communism is not correctly described: "Orthodox and Baptists advocate a passive attitude to public life and to social progress." That is not true. The Russian Orthodox Church is not at all passive in its attitude to public life and to social progress. It expresses its approval or disapproval through its moral sanctions, and thus interferes in the public life of our country. It has the opportunity to influence public life. It is constantly reiterating that Christianity improves social conditions and encourages progress. "As a religion in spirit and in truth (John 4:22) Christianity contains thoughts which are eternal, and directly or indirectly it therefore influences the progress and perfection of human society" (quotation from the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate", No 2, 1958).

The Baptists and Gospel-Christians go still further. "All that should have been analysed more thoroughly in the handbook."

The "Atheist's Handbook" does not contain "a thorough account of the history of atheist thought, either, nor of the bases of Marx-Leninist proletarian atheism". This gap "must be filled without fail when the next edition of the Handbook appears".

The question of "religion and science" must also be more thoroughly examined in the next edition, and a number of somewhat unfortunate formulations must be improved.

The handbook is not convincing in its criticism of the theory of "the expanding universe", and especially the theory that the world will "be consumed by heat". Instead of refuting the latter theory, the handbook simply says, if it should happen this would not mean the end of the world because "matter would in any case subsist" ... and "because mankind would then be able to emigrate to other parts of the universe" (as prophesied by the Russian scholar K.E. Ziolkovsky already in the nineteenth century). "If such phrases were quoted, the handbook would be much more valuable."

The handbook rightly shows "the superiority of communist morality, of the well-balanced, intellectually superior and more gifted man (who explores the depths of the oceans and of the cosmos, harnesses the forces of nature, and transforms society in the interest of the masses) in comparison with the spiritual impoverishment of the religious man."

But this section of the handbook is inadequate too, because "it is a well-known fact that every religion contains specific ethical principles, in addition to general principles." Nothing is said about these in the handbook. It does not mention "the basic categories of religious ethics, the concepts of duty, good and evil." Nor does it take into account the adaptability of the Tserkovniki (church people), especially the members of sects, on ethical questions. For instance, the Baptists and Gospel-Christians do not deny the existence of a Kingdom of God on earth (i.e. a happy life such as that envisaged by communism on an entirely different basis). "But they consider this earthly kingdom of God merely as a stage on the way to his eternal Kingdom."

A question of such importance should not be treated so summarily. "This must be dealt with differently in the next edition of the handbook." The section on "religious books and church festivals" contains no practical indications as to how the struggle is to be waged against religious customs (e.g. the organisation of wedding-ceremonies by the Komsomol, a communist harvest festival, etc.).

Lastly, the reviewer criticises the form of the handbook; he says it should have been divided into two or three smaller volumes, which would have been more convenient.

The special methods of atheist propaganda should be more effectively recommended. "There is no excuse for this omission." Then "the chapters written by different authors repeat the same thing too much." The style should also be simpler and more readable. "Too many foreign words are used, without any explanation of their meaning."

The Sixtine Madonna

In a poem dedicated to the Sixtine Madonna, A. Kovalenkov extols it as follows:

"The most enthusiastic admirers of Raphael's Sixtine Madonna have always asserted that the divine Madonna with her charming face is only a woman. But the (religious) hypocrites would not leave her in peace. However, the women who showed themselves so heroic at the siege of Leningrad, and the daughters of the men who defended Stalingrad, talk with the Madonna about the ties between human hearts. From the picture a mother looks down on them who holds her child aloft above rivers, forests and valleys and strides forward towards the radiant fields of art."

Nauka i Religia, No 10, 1960

Atheist obituary notices

Atheist obituary notices are becoming commoner in the USSR. One of them reads as foll ws: "The eminent Soviet atheist and Doctor of Philosophy, Professor A.P. Gagarin, died on the 6th September. He had been a member of the communist party since 1918 ... Professor Gagarin was an indefatigable advocate of the Marx-Leninist ideology; he was ruthless in exposing the inhumane ideology of the bourgeois class, and religious obscurantism and superstition. He published over sixty works on the philosophy of atheism. Under his guidance dozens of students defended their dissertations on philosophy and hundreds of active atheists were trained.

"A.P. Gagarin did a great deal of publication work. Until the end of his life he was president of the office of the atheist section of the society for the promotion of politics and science in the RSFSR (Russian part of the Soviet Union). The communist party and the Soviet government thought very highly of his work and decorated him with the Order of Lenin, twice with the Order of the Red Flag and with other medals.

"Professor Gagarin was a comrade of fine principles, modest, sensitive and warm-hearted, always ready to help other people. He was a true son of the communist party and of the Soviet people, and his memory will shine in the hearts of all who knew him and worked with him."

Coming-of-age celebrations in Aizupe (Latvia)

Aizupe, in the North West of Latvia, has not many inhabitants, but on the 10th June all the people gathered for a big meeting, organised by the Kolchose, to celebrate the "coming-of-age" of all the sixteen-year-old boys and girls. The front seats in the hall of the "House of Culture" were filled with boys in dark uniforms and girls in new white frocks, and one by one they were called up onto the platform.

The chairman was the head of the Kolchose, assisted on the platform by representatives of the local branches of the society for the promotion of politics and science (the official title for atheist propaganda).

To the strains of the orchestra the young people went up to the platform. They were young workers in the Kolchose or pupils at the college of Forestry.

"In former times young people of sixteen were confirmed. This year not a single boy or girl in the Aizupe district has applied to the pastor for confirmation." Comrade Inka spoke a short word of greeting to each of the young people in turn as she presented them with a certificate of maturity.

Comrade Sprude, president of the Kolchose, presented a gift to tractor driver Bach, in the name of the Kolchose management. And all the others received presents from the school collectives, from the College of Forestry or from friends and relatives. And of course they all carried home great bunches of flowers afterwards, for a festival in Latvia is unthinkable without flowers. That is why the "coming-of-age" ceremony is held in the summer, when nature helps to increase the merriment.

Extracts from the dialogue in an atheist play

(Kybernetik and Religion)

"Consultation" is the name of a one-act atheist play by A. Glebov, with three characters: Alexei Starovoit (a priest, aged 29), Kolia Zesdrin (a boy leaving school, aged 18) and Minodora (a nun, aged 55). The action takes place in Minodora's room in a Soviet city.

Minodora persuades Kolia to have a talk with the Priest Alexei about entering the Religious Seminary. He feels attracted by the Church, although he does not know much about it. As there are a great many icons in Minodora's room, she reminds him to cross himself. Kolia obeys.

Minodora: What did you learn during your ten years at school - geography, Marxism, communism - but the cursed anti-Christians never taught you to make the sign of the Cross. That must make Veliar very happy!

Kolia: Who is Veliar?

Minodora: Fancy not knowing that. You must have worn out at least ten pairs of trousers sitting on the school-bench ... Veliar is the chief of the host of demons ...

Minodora describes Kolia's future in glowing terms. He will be well paid, if he does not observe the Canon of the Church too closely (paragraphs 23, 44, and 62). According to these paragraphs, priests must not take anything for performing services ("Treby") except the free gifts of the faithful. If he demands more, he risks losing his position. But that does not prevent the higher clergy from charging 100 roubles for a baptism, 200-300 roubles for a funeral and 500 roubles or more for a wedding.

Kolia: How is that possible? They risk losing their position and are committing a great sin.

Minodora: Yes, a great sin. But if there were no sins, one would have nothing to repent of ... Everything depends on sin.

Kolia: That is not good ... Do many priests lose their positions?

Mirodora: A lot of them ought to be sacked, but if they were, there would be no more priests!

Kolia: How much does an honest priest (a "Bezsrebrenik") earn?

Mirodora: At least 2,000 roubles.

Kolia: If that is the legal salary, what about the others?

Mirodora: They get from 8,000 to 10,000 roubles. In rich churches the head priest gets as much as 25,000 roubles a month.

The priest Alexei enters. He blesses Mirodora, and turns to bless Kolia, but changes his mind. "No need", he says, "Kolia is still hesitating, so we had better wait."

Kolia: I've made up my mind.

Alexei: Have you really decided to enter the seminary?

Kolia: Yes, I have.

Alexei to Mirodora: Why this consultation with me, then?

Mirodora: But he is only 18. What does he know about decisions? His guardian angel is calling him to enter the Church, and the devil is calling him to football matches, sports clubs or the cinema. There are as many temptations as grains of sand on the sea-shore. That's why I asked you to come over. He doesn't know which way his feet will take him.

Alexei: How right you are. Let us have a straight talk - as we do at confession.

Mirodora takes the hint and leaves the room.

Alexei learns that Kolia's father is a skilled plumber, and that his mother used to work in the public baths.

Alexei: Is she a Christian?

Kolia: (smiling) I should just say so!

Alexei: Why are you laughing?

Kolia: (confused) I don't know.

Alexei: If anyone laughs about religion, he is either not a believer or a bad believer. Are you really a believer?

Kolia: I believe in God, the Sacraments and everything.

Alexei: Do you believe in the biblical story about the sun standing still at human command? For if that had happened, even if only for a second, science proves that it would have meant a tremendous catastrophe and that life would have been completely destroyed...

Kolia does not reply.

Alexei: Well, do you or do you not believe what is in the Bible? If you don't believe it, how can you become a priest? You will have to defend every letter of the Bible against the atheists, because the believers maintain that it is divinely-inspired... Have you ever heard of Tertullian? No! He was an extremely intelligent man for the age in which he lived, but after he became a Christian, science meant nothing to him in comparison with the Gospel. "Credo quia absurdum", he said. He regarded everything as absurd - life on earth, science, everything except religion.

Kolia nodded

Alexei: So you agree with him that the glorious order of the universe is absurd - the brilliant colours of nature, the beautiful colours in the sacred icons, the music and all the other joys which are blessed by the Church? The innocent eyes of children who know nothing about sin? And is not motherhood venerated in the form of the Mother of God?

Kolia: (stands up) Excuse me, Father Alexei, but I am not prepared for an examination of this kind...

Alexei: That's why we are having this talk.

Kolia: You are leading me into temptation. I don't know enough yet about Christian doctrine to give you the right answer. It's strange that you, a priest, are asking me the same questions as our physics teacher at school, who was the biggest atheist of them all.

Alexei: Haven't you ever asked these questions yourself?

Kolia: And you?

Alexei: I have asked them and I have answered them.

Kolia: How have you answered them?

Alexei: We'll change roles now. I've heard your confession. Now you can listen to mine. It may be useful to you. My parents were farmers. They were not particularly pious, but they went regularly to church, and little Alexei was deeply impressed by the mystic ceremonial of the service. His soul began to feel divided. On the one hand he was obliged to believe what he was taught at school. One can't help believing the results of an experiment in physics. On the other hand he also believed in life after death, in the salvation of the soul through good works, in the mercy of God and in the Holy Sacraments. He was most impressed of all by the starry heavens at night; he often looked at the stars wonderingly, for science had not yet completely convinced him.

Kolia: Yes, that's just it, Father Alexei.

Alexei: You needn't call me "Father" any more ... Do you know what it was that opened my eyes? It was 'kybernetiks'.

Golia: What is that?

Alexei: Haven't you ever heard of 'kybernetiks'?

Kolia: Our physics teacher talked about it. It was very hard to understand.

Alexei: Yes, it's hard to understand, but it must and can be understood. 'Kybernetiks' is a new branch of mathematics. It tries to discover the laws which govern the work of automatic machines, especially electronic calculating machines, but also the nerve system of living creatures. The brain is not a machine ... it is a million times more complicated than any machine. But there is something similar all the same between the workings of the brain and those of the electronic machine. They both work in accordance with the same logical scheme. Logic is indispensable, especially for anyone who wants to understand himself and such a complicated thing as the human thought process. The logical calculating machine works on the principle of double-entry book-keeping. The most complicated accounts are entered in two columns, and the logical reflections are also set down parallel. Have you ever noticed a division in yourself when you pray, so that you feel a duality in yourself?

Kolia: Yes.

Alexei: Now reflect: what is praying really? Praying is talking to oneself, as madmen do. Have you noticed how normal people talk to themselves quietly and logically all the time, not aloud. When you think you divide your mind into two parts and discuss things with yourself.

Kolia: That's right.

Alexei: This is certainly the origin of the problem of the guardian angel and tempting devil. Everything is explained by the laws of 'kybernetiks'. A similar process takes place in the brain to that in the electronic calculating machine. We don't realise this process because it takes place so rapidly. But in prayer this division of thought, this continual dialogue within the human brain, becomes conscious.

Kolia: You mean that what we think is God's voice is only our own mind?

Alexei: Exactly.

Kolia: How marvell us! Did you discover that yourself or did you read it somewhere?

Alexei: I discovered it myself, though someone else may have written about it. I was trained as an electronic computer. It was during my military service that I experienced my worst spiritual crisis. I thought I should find an answer to the problems that troubled me through technics and politics. But when I talked about it, people laughed at me. My political teacher was a dry, cold type, whose answers did not satisfy me. Then I happened to meet a girl, a very clever girl who believed in religion, and who won me for religion. Like Tertullian, I rejected science and began to seek explanations for my problems in the Christian faith. After leaving the army, I entered the religious seminary. A lot of good people broke with me because of that decision. After finishing my studies at the seminary I married the girl, became a priest and worked as a priest for three years.

Kolia: Mother Minodora calls you a "Bezsrebrenik", a poor and honourable priest.

Alexei: Nonsense, there's nothing holy about me. I'm just an ordinary, decent chap. Already at the seminary I was sickened by the hypocrisy and avarice in the Church. But what shocked me most was the scholasticism - it simply stinks of putrefaction. It forces you to learn by heart all sorts of nonsense, which simply revolts you. That's called "accepting absurdity". And I did accept it. It took all my will-power to force my reason to kneel to the dogmas of religion. I forced myself to make fun of reason. It was torture , Kolia, and I hope you will never go through that.

Kolia: Why?

Alexei: Why? I told you I would talk to you, so that you don't make the same mistake as I did. You are sinking into a morass, and when you get out of it you can't remain indifferent.

Kolia: What did you say, Father Alexei?

Alexei: You heard what I said. I am no longer a priest. The blessing which I bestowed on Minodora was my last act of hypocrisy. I have decided to stop dressing like a priest, to break away completely from the Church, and to return to more constructive work in society. I urge you to do the same. Train to be an electro-technician like me, a real specialist. I'm starting my new job next week. In ten years' time when you are married and are earning a lot of money, it will be difficult for you to leave the Church. You know how amoral the clergy are, how they tear each other to pieces in order to secure a cosy little job for themselves. Believe me or believe me not: in every religious confession there are people who believe, as I did, because they have not realised that they are believing in their own shadow. Most of the priests are cynics and gluttons who play about with women, and think of nothing but money. If you only knew how cynically they talk about the money they get out of the church goers ...

Minodora: (rushing into the room) Kolia, Kolia don't believe him;
(to Alexei) you're lying and leading him astray, you devil!
(to Kolia) don't listen to him;
(to Alexei) perish, thou unclean spirit!

Alexei: No, I won't die just yet! But I'll shake the dust of your house off my feet, Minodora. In the paper next week you will read of my official resignation.

Minodora: (to Kolia) Don't listen to this devil.

Kolia: I'd rather listen to him than cast out devils with a pack of half-crazy women.

Alexei: No, Minodora is not crazy. But she is just as cynical and avaricious as His Eminence Antony and all the other grabbing clergy.

Minodora: Stay here, Kolia!

Kolia: Let's go, Alexei Iljitsh.

Alexei: To the factory?

Kolia: Yes, of course. You must find someone else, Minodora.

Minodora: I'll find someone else. We can manage quite well without you!

An anti-religious caricature

In the centre a round laughing face - the earth. High up on the left - the sickle moon. In the background on the right - Saturn. Above - the Milky Way. In front of the earth on the left are the "Lunik" and the first "Sputnik"; on the right are two more "Sputniks" holding a banner with the following inscription: "We have circled all round the universe and have not found God anywhere (Vsiu vselennuiu oboshli - nigde boga ne nashli)."

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